

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00067 031131Z

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2130

S E C R E T BEIRUT 0067

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR US PLO XF

SUBJECT: US CONTACTS WITH PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION (PLO)

1. THIS CABLE SUMMARIZES OUR A-01 (JAN 3), IN WHICH WE SUGGEST TIME HAS COME FOR USG TO ENGAGE PLO LEADERSHIP IN TENTATIVE, EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE AIMED AT FINDING OUT--ONCE AND FOR ALL--IF 'ARAFAT AND CO. ARE WILLING MAKE HARD CHOICES THAT MIGHT QUALIFY THEM TO PARTICIPATE CONSTRUCTIVELY IN ME SETTLEMENT PROCESS. WE BASE THIS RECOMMENDATION ON FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS WHICH WE FIND COMPELLING:

(A) WE DISCERN GROWING GENERAL FEELING THROUGHOUT ME THAT PACE OF US-INSPIRED PEACE EFFORT HAS SLACKENED, THAT SITUATION CANNOT LONG CONTINUE AS IS, AND THAT IT WILL PROBABLY TERMINATE IN NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE IN ANOTHER MAJOR ARAB-ISRAELI WAR. CURRENT FROZEN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN EQUATION AND DETERIORATING STATE OF AFFAIRS ALONG LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER ARE SALIENT FEATURES OF THIS SITUATION. SEEMS TO US THAT SOME NEW ELEMENT OUGHT TO BE INJECTED INTO SITUATION IN ORDER TO ARREST THESE UNHELPFUL TRENDS (OR AT LEAST BUY SOME MORE TIME FOR ALL PARTIES CONCERNED).

(B) WE PRESUME NO ONE DOUBTS (1) IMPORTANCE OF PALESTINIAN QUESTION AS KEY ISSUE WHOSE SOLUTION IS ESSENTIAL TO ANY JUST AND DURABLE ME SETTLEMENT, AND

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00067 031131Z

(2) CAPACITY OF PLO TO INFLUENCE-- FOR GOOD OR FOR ILL--

FUTURE COURSE OF SETTLEMENT EFFORT. HOWEVER INVONVENIENT ITS EXISTENCE OR REPUGNANT ITS BEHAVIOR, PLO HAS BECOME A POLITICAL REALITY WHICH IS NOT RPT NOT LIKELY TO FADE OR WITHER WITH PASSAGE OF TIME. ITS PRETENSIONS TO REPRESENT AND ACT AS CREDIBLE INTERLOCUTOR FOR PALESTINIAN NATIONAL ASPIRATIONS HAVE MATURED TO POINT WHERE THEY NOW COMMAND FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER SYMPATHY AND/OR SUPPORT-- IF NOT OF ALL PALESTINIANS EVERYWHERE--AT LEAST OF VERY BROAD SPECTRUM OF PALESTINIAN AND ARAB POPULAR OPINION THROUGH- OUT ME. NO MATTER HOW STRONGLY ARAB GOVTS MAY DESIRE PEACE, THEY HAVE CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED AT RABAT SUMMIT AND ON SUBSEQUENT OCCASIONS THEIR UNWILLINGNESS TO TAKE RISKS INHERENT IN IMPOSING AN UNACCEPTABLE SOLUTION ON PALESTINIANS. AS MATTERS STAND NOW AND FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE, PLO THEREFORE APPEARS TO BE SOLE AGENCY CAPABLE OF ACTING ON BEHALF OF PALESTINIANS IN NEGOTIATING PROCESS. ALL THIS, TAKEN TOGETHER WITH OUR ASSUMPTION THAT SOME KIND OF EVENTUAL AND DIRECT PARTICIPATION BY PALESTINIANS IN NEGOTIATING PROCESS IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE DURABLE SETTLEMENT, MEANS THAT PLO IS FORCE TO BE SOMEHOW DEALT (OR OTHERWISE RECKONED) WITH AT SOME POINT IN OUR EFFORTS TO EXERT POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON FUTURE COURSE OF EVENTS IN ME.

(C) IF USG BELIEVES (AS WE DO) THAT A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE AND FORTHCOMING ATTITUDE ON PART OF PLO LEADERSHIP-- PARTICULARLY ON SUCH QUESTIONS AS CURTAILING TERRORISM AND "ARMED STRUGGLE" AGAINST ISRAEL, ACCEPTING NOTION OF CO-EXISTENCE WITH ISRAEL, AND COOPERATING WITH (INSTEAD OF OBSTRUCTING) SETTLEMENT EFFORT-- WOULD MATERIALLY ASSIST OUR ATTEMPTS TO BRING OVERALL SETTLEMENT ABOUT, IT WOULD BEHOOVE US TO DETERMINE, ONCE AND FOR ALL, WHETHER THIS POSSIBILITY ACTUALLY EXISTS. IN OUR VIEW, US EXHORTATIONS TO PLO TO "SHAPE UP" IN ABOVE-MENTIONED RESPECTS ARE NOT RPT NOT LIKELY TO HAVE MUCH POSITIVE EFFECT UNLESS AND UNTIL WE CONVEY THIS MESSAGE TO 'ARAFAT AND CO. DIRECTLY AND AT CLOSE QUARTERS. WE UNDERSTAND CURRENT ISRAELI ATTITUDE VIS-A-VIS PLO AND OUR CONSEQUENT RELUCTANCE TO APPROACH PLO AT THIS STAGE IN THE PEACE MAKING PROCESS. HOWEVER, IF WE EXPLAINED OUR APPROACH TO THE ISRAELIS IN TERMS OF AN EFFORT TO OBTAIN A MORATORIUM ON TERRORISM BY THE PLO, THE ISRAELI REACTION MIGHT BE REDUCED TO MANAGEABE PROPORTIONS.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00067 031131Z

(D) EVEN IF SUCH AN OVERTURE, WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE ON INFORMAL AND HIGHLY SECRET BASIS, SHOULD FAIL TO PRODUCE POSITIVE RESULTS, WE WOULD AT LEAST BE IN BETTER POSITION TO (1) DEMONSTRATE TO SADAT, ASSAD, FEISAL AND OTHER ARAB LEADERS THAT OUR EFFORT TO ELICIT PALESTINIAN COOPERATION WAS NOT RE- CIPROCATED BY PLO, AND (2) FORMULATE MORE REALISTIC IDEAS ABOUT HOW TO TAKE "LEGITIMATE PALESTINIAN INTERESTS" INTO

ACCOUNT IN FUTURE.

(E) WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF ANY US-PLO CONTACTS WOULD BE SIMPLIFIED IF INITIATED PRIOR RPT PRIOR TO PROCLAMATION OF PROVISIONAL PALESTINIAN GOVT-IN-EXILE. ANY ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH SUCH CONTACTS FOLLOWING THAT DEVELOPMENT WOULD POSE ISSUE OF "RECOGNITION" IN MORE ACUTE, AND POSSIBLE UNPALATABLE, FORM.

2. ALTHOUGH POINTS MENTIONED ABOVE UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE BEEN RAISED AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER IN PAST, WE URGE THAT THEY BE RE-EXAMINED--ALONG WITH OTHER ARGUMENTATION CONTAINED IN OUR A-01--IN LIGHT OF CURRENT SITUATION AND TRENDS IN ME.
GODLEY

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